

Kisah Wira Tidak Di Dendang: Cabaran Dan Usaha Guru -Guru Bahasa Inggeris Di Sebuah Sekolah Kebangsaan Asli Di Malaysia

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ABSTRAK

Pengenalan- Kebanyakan kajian Pendidikan Orang Asli terfokus kepada pengukuran literasi murid Orang Asli dan juga tentang halangan sosio-budaya di dalam proses pembelajaran di sekolah; tetapi tidak banyak kajian di lakukan tentang pengalaman guru-guru yang mengajar murid Orang Asli di sekolah, terutamanya di dalam mengajar Bahasa Inggeris.

Objektif – Kajian ini meliputi tema penyediaan pendidikan holistik dengan meneroka cabaran yang di hadapi dan usaha yang di lakukan oleh guru-guru di sebuah sekolah kebangsaan Orang Asli di Malaysia.

Metodologi – Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kajian kes dan di jalankan di sebuah sekolah kebangsaan Orang Asli di Semenanjung Malaysia yang mempunyai hampir 100% murid Orang Asli. Kajian ini melibatkan sembilan guru Bahasa Inggeris di kedua sekolah berkenaan. Data di kutip melalui temubual berstruktur dan data kemudiannya di analisis menggunakan analisis bertema, dimana data di transkripsi , di kod dan di kategorikan mengikut tema yang signifikan.

Dapatan – Dapatan kajian menunjukkan guru-guru berhadapan dengan dua cabaran iaitu gaya pembelajaran murid yang berbeza dan juga masalah kepakaran guru. Walaubagaimanapun, guru-guru juga berusaha untuk memahami budaya pelajar dan mengenalpasti kekuatan pelajar di dalam mendidik mereka.

Kepentingan –Adalah di harapkan bahawa dapatan kajian dapat menyumbang kepada pengembangan profesional dan juga menjadi agenda yang menyokong guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris yang mengajar di sekolah Orang Asli.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Orang Asli, pengalaman guru Bahasa Inggeris

Stories of The Unsung Heroes: Challenges and Efforts of The English Language Teachers at An Indigenous School in Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Introduction- Many studies on indigenous education focus on gauging the indigenous students' literacy and understanding the sociocultural barriers in learning; however less studies have been done on reconnoitering the teachers' experiences in teaching indigenous school children, especially in teaching the English language.

Purpose – The current paper will address the theme of holistic education by exploring the challenges faced by English language teachers at an indigenous national school. It will also talk about the exertions made by the teachers in their quest of enhancing the teaching and learning process.

Methodology – This study used the case study approach that was conducted at an indigenous school in Malaysia. The school is a national school that has 100% indigenous students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine primary school English language teachers. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis, where data were transcribed verbatim, coded and characterized into substantial themes.

Findings – The findings show that the English language teachers were faced with two main challenges which were navigating the learning issues of indigenous children and expertise issues of the teachers. However, despite the challenges, the teachers were constantly thinking of ways for the betterment of the indigenous students' holistic achievement such as trying to understand the students' cultural norms as well as nurturing the inclination of students in learning.

Significance – It is hoped that this study could contribute to the professional development efforts and supportive agendas for English language teachers teaching indigenous school children.

Keywords: : indigenous education ; English language teachers' experiences

Introduction

Indigenous education has received attention worldwide as the world is moving towards a more inclusive and holistic education. Many studies on indigenous education focus on gauging the indigenous students' literacy and understanding the sociocultural barriers in learning; however less studies have been done on reconnoitering the teachers' experiences in teaching indigenous school children, especially in teaching the English language.

The current paper will address the theme of holistic education by exploring the challenges faced by English language teachers at an indigenous national school. It will also talk about the exertions made by the teachers in their quest of enhancing the teaching and learning process. Thus, the paper will answer the following questions:

- i. What are the challenges faced by the English language teachers in teaching indigenous school children?
- ii. What are the efforts taken by the English language teachers in enhancing the teaching and learning process?

Literature review

Indigenous community in Malaysia

The indigenous community in Malaysia is a part of the multiracial communities, due to the long history of colonialization and migration. Malaysia entails three mainstream clusters namely the Malays, Chinese and Indians, and the indigenous groups are only 0.7% from the total population of Malaysia. The Malaysian government defined indigenous people or known as *Orang Asli* (original people) as individuals from the *Orang Asli* lineage that practice the indigenous cultural way of life and communicate using their indigenous languages in Peninsular Malaysia (Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA), 2016). There are around 180 000 indigenous people in Malaysia and they are divided into three main assemblages known as the Senoi, Proto-Malay and Negrito. Each major group is made up of smaller tribes such as Temuan, Semai, and Jahai. The complete list of the indigenous tribes is illustrated in Figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1: The indigenous assemblages in Malaysia (adapted from JAKOA Strategic Plan 2016-2020)

As depicted in Figure 1.1, the three major indigenous groups contain smaller tribes. According to the Department of the Orang Asli Development (2016), The Senoi group is the largest group with 54.9 % of the total population of the indigenous people in Malaysia. The Senoi group comprises Semai, Temiar, Jahut, Che Wong, Mahmeri and Semoq Beri tribes. The second largest group, with 42.3% of the total population, is the Proto-Malay, which consist of the Temuan, Semelai, Jakun, Kanaq, Orang Kuala and Seletar ethnic tribes. The Negrito, which is composed of Kensui, Kintak, Lanoh, Jahai, Mendriq and Bateq tribes; is the smallest group with 2.8% of the total population.

The welfares of the Orang Asli in Malaysia have been one of the agenda of the ruling government since the 1930s. The administration of the indigenous peoples' affairs in Malaysia was instigated in Perak when the state government enforced 'Perak Aboriginal

Tribes Enactment' No.3, December 1939 by appointing a 'Field Ethnographer' who acts as a 'Protector of Aborigines'. In 1954, to monitor the affairs of Orang Asli and under the Aboriginal People Ordinance, No.3 1954, the Indigenous Peoples Department or Jabatan Orang Asli (JOA) was established under the Malaysian Ministry of Rural Development; and later of the year the department was rebranded as the Malaysian Department of Orang Asli Affairs or *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli* (JHEOA). After 47 years, in 2011, JHEOA was retitled The Department of Orang Asli Development or *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* (JAKOA) . The preliminary objectives of the indigenous department in Malaysia was to preserve and guard the indigenous people and their way of life from modern developments; however, with the establishment of JAKOA, the objectives was extended to advancing the indigenous communities so that they are synonymous with the mainstream communities in Malaysia (JAKOA, 2016).

Issues of schooling of the Indigenous children

In understanding the issues faced by the indigenous children in terms of schooling, it is essential to understand the schooling system for the indigenous children in Malaysia. The formal education of the indigenous children can be traced back to the 1960's where the education of the indigenous children was managed by the Department of Indigenous People, that also was also managing other areas of the indigenous people development such as health and land ownership (Edo , 2019; Mohd Noor, 2012). Not until the 1990's that the education of the indigenous children was put under the management of the Ministry of Education and it became more focussed and structured.

At the primary and secondary level, the indigenous children can attend three types of schools: regular national schools, national schools specifically for indigenous pupils and special comprehensive schools or known as K9 schools. For the first option, indigenous pupils join national schools that are also attended by the other mainstream communities in Malaysia. For the second option, some indigenous students attend national schools that are attended by 100% indigenous students and situated in the vicinity of indigenous villages and areas. To date there are around 92 primary schools that are situated in indigenous people settlements all over Peninsular Malaysia (JAKOA, 2018). These schools use national curriculums and are monitored closely by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The third option is attending a Special Model School (K9) or better known as K9 School that offers 10-year schooling from pre-school to primary to the lower secondary levels (Ramlah, 2009). There are around five K9 schools in Peninsular Malaysia, and these schools are mostly built in rural areas, usually adjacent to indigenous community areas (Puteh-Behak, 2019; Edo, 2019). The main objective of the establishment of these K9 schools is to ensure schooling continuance from pre school to lower secondary level. These schools offer boarding facilities for students and provide vocational education alongside the implementation of the national curriculum (Puteh-Behak, 2019) K9 schools are gaining its popularity among the indigenous community and in 2017, it is reported that more than 3500 indigenous students attended K9 schools (JAKOA, 2018).

The most common cited problem of the indigenous education in Malaysia is the issues of school dropout (Ainol Hamidah & Saemah, 2018 ; Amiruddin et al., 2015; Isa & Aini, 2018; Mohd Nor et al., 2018; Marzuki et al., 2017). Table 1.2 displays the number and percentage of dropout among indigenous students from 2009 to 2017. It shows that about 500 to 1000 indigenous students who had finished their primary level did not register for secondary school. Although the dropout proportion reduced from 28.70% in 2009 to 17.00% in 2017, it was reported that there were around 700 students who did not continue to the secondary level.

The number of students who completed the primary level		The number of students who registered for secondary level		The number of dropouts	Dropout percentage (%)
Year	Number of students	Year	Number of students		
2009	4,411	2010	3,145	1,266	28.70%
2010	4,271	2011	3,001	1,270	29.74%
2011	4,091	2012	3,046	1,045	25.54%
2012	4,705	2013	3,519	1,186	25.21%
2013	4,464	2014	3,478	986	22.09%
2014	4,295	2015	3,444	851	19.81%
2015	4,488	2016	3,710	770	17.16%
2016	4,222	2017	3,515	707	16.75%
2017	3,994	2018	3,315	679	17.00%

Table 1.2: Dropout rate among indigenous students from 2009 to 2017 (Source: JAKOA, 2018)

Methodology

The findings of this study were apart from a larger qualitative research project that investigated the issues of schooling and socio-cultural learning inclinations among indigenous students in national schools in Malaysia, specifically in the area of the English language learning. The project involved multiple data collection methods such as document study, semi-structured interviews and English language tests. Additionally, this research project involved significant stakeholders in the indigenous pupils' education such as the indigenous students, parents, teachers, school administrators, indigenous community leaders and JAKOA officers as research participants. However, data and findings discussed in the current paper were only derived from the semi-structured interviews with the English language teachers.

Research location and participants

The current study was conducted at SK Melati (pseudonym), a national school that is specialized for indigenous students. The school is located in a state at the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia and situated in the areas of several indigenous communities.

The participants of the study were nine teachers who were given the responsibility of teaching the English language subject in SK Melati. They were chosen based on a purposive sampling technique as the participants were selected based on certain characteristics that are essential to the overall framework of the research project. The characteristics were:

- i. Teachers who are teaching the English language
- ii. willingness to participate in the research project.

Data Collection and data analysis

The data discussed in this paper were collected from semi structured interviews of nine teachers. The interviews were carried out face-to-face and each interview was around 40-45 minutes. The interviews were recorded using digital voice recorders. The interview questions were designed based on the following constructs:

- i. the advantages and challenges in teaching/educating indigenous students
- ii. the challenges faced by indigenous pupils in pursuing education

Data were then transcribed verbatim where words that were being said were transcribed verbatim without considering the linguistic cues such as intonation, pauses and hedges. The data were then analysed using the thematic analysis where all data were transcribed verbatim, categorized and coded based on main themes and sub-themes. The discussion in this paper is based on these themes and subthemes.

Research procedures

The research procedures consist of three phases as illustrated in Figure 1. 3. The research project began with the process on building the instrument, in this case the interview protocols. The interview protocols were developed based on related literatures from various sources specifically on indigenous education as well as issues surrounding the topic. At phase 2, data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The participants were interviewed individually in separate sessions by several researchers. Phase 3 was the data analysis stage when all audio recorded data gathered from the interviews were transcribed and later analysed using thematic analysis approach. The data were divided into several significant themes and are discussed in the current paper.

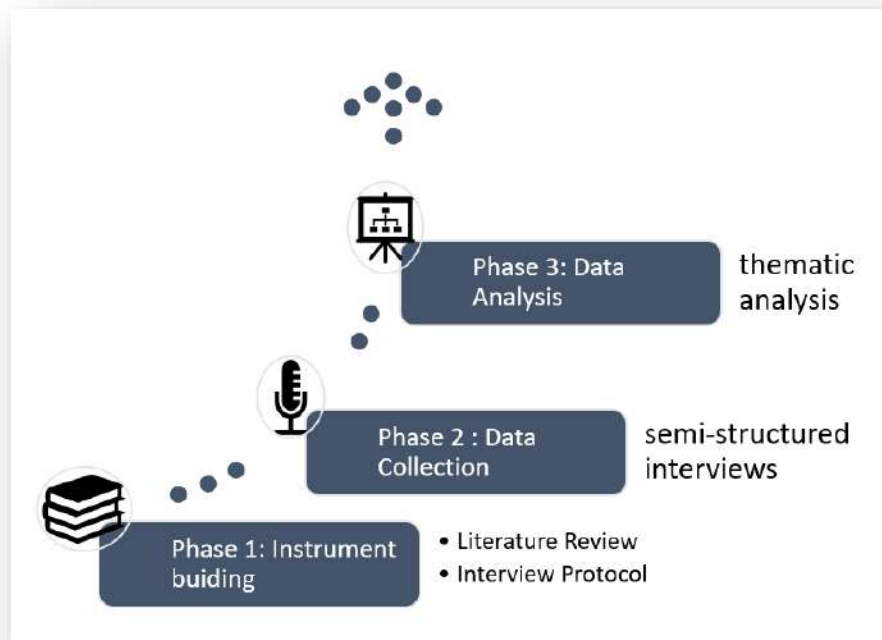


Figure 1.3: Research procedures

Result

This section illustrates the findings of the investigation. Generally, the findings show that the English language teachers were faced with two main challenges which were navigating the learning issues of indigenous children and expertise issues of the teachers. However, despite the challenges, the teachers were constantly thinking of ways for the betterment of the indigenous students' holistic achievement such as trying to understand and adapting the students' cultural norms as well as identifying the inclination of students in learning.

Challenges: Teaching and learning issues

It seems that the English language teachers faced a few issues of learning among the indigenous students such as poor attendance and the position of the English language as the third language. In addition, the teachers were also dealing with their own expertise issues in teaching the English language.

First, some teachers highlighted that the indigenous students had poor attendance to school. Teacher Naim mentioned that the student's attendance was sometimes influenced by the fruit-picking season. He stated that some students were absent especially during the fruit-picking season as many were involved in picking fruits such as durian with their family members. He stated that "*I tried to do different techniques in class, but it was hard. If it is the fruit-picking season, they will be a lot of students absent from the class, especially the durian season. In the fruit-picking season, there were a lot of students who would skip class*

to pick durian with their families”. In addition, Teacher Farha also highlighted the poor attendance among the indigenous students. She said that the school had come out with a lot of plans in minimizing absenteeism among the students such as going into their village and talk to their parents and making it compulsory for parents to see the school counselors before receiving any monetary aid from the government that is distributed through the school. The counselor would then, according to Teacher Farha, advise the parents to make sure their children to attend school. The method worked for a few weeks and the absenteeism would relapse. Teacher Farha stated that *“One of the main issues is the absenteeism among the students. We (the school) have tried many ways; we have gone to their houses. When there is any financial aid that the government is giving to parents through the school, we will make it compulsory for them to see the counselor. Cannot get the money first. The counselor will explain the importance of school. Then, the kids will come to school for 2-3 weeks. After that, they will be absent again.”*

Secondly, data show that the students were struggling with learning the English language as the language is, in reality, the third language for the indigenous children. Teacher Sam explained that that majority of the students were from the Semai tribe and they speak the Semai language at home. The students were learning the national language, Bahasa Melayu when they enrolled in school around six to seven years old. Teacher Sam said that the students were also struggling with acquiring the national language, and learning another language, which is the English language was quite challenging. She said that the students can only practice the language for a limited time in which with teachers during school time. *“The main challenge for me is that the English language is the third language for the children. Even they have not mastered Bahasa Melayu, let alone the English language. At home that don’t use the Malay language, they speak the Semai language. The English language is just learned with teachers at school.”* This point is supported by Teacher Naim when he mentioned that the students had difficulty in accepting the English language as the language is fairly new to them. They are more accustomed to the Malay language and their own mother tongue, the Semai language. He said *“It is hard for them to accept English, the English language is new to them. So.. it is like , in their village, they use their mother tongue, the Semai language. The Malay language is their second language”*.

Another challenge is that the teachers felt that they were disadvantaged as most teachers are not majoring in the English language subject, even though they were teaching the language in the school. This point was brought up by Teacher Naim when he mentioned that the school had one English language teacher that was majoring in the subject. The rest, according to him , took the English language as a minor in their teacher training degree. He said that *“The second issue is that, we are short of option teachers (teachers majoring in the English language), we have only one. The others are teachers who took the subject as electives before. That is one obstacle that we face here, not enough English language teachers”*. In addition, Teacher Hani stated that she herself was only minoring in the

English language subject. She was concerned that her teaching methods were not good enough in teaching the English language to the students. She said that *“To me , the most challenging is being an elective teacher, I am not an option teacher (teachers majoring in the English language). Sometimes, I am worried if I teach the school kids correctly, whether what I do is right, whether my pronunciation is correct”*.

Efforts: Understanding students’ culture and identifying their strengths /inclination in learning

Data shows that despite the challenges, the teachers were motivated to make the teaching and learning process to be more meaningful for the students. Among the efforts are closing the gap between teachers and students by understanding their sociocultural values and developing the holistic development of the students rather than be too focused on academic excellence.

Firstly, some teachers realized the importance of closing the gap between teachers and students by understanding their sociocultural values in order to stimulate a positive learning environment. Teacher Sam stated that she made sure that she knows the culture of her students and maintain a good rapport with the students. Among the efforts she had done were going into the villages and meet the students as well as speak their language. She said that *“These indigenous children, we have to know their culture. We know them personally, we get close to them, and we use their language. Sometimes, I would go into their villages, I would use their language”*. Teacher Sam also mentioned that if a teacher does not make any effort in maintaining a good relationship; a mistake usually done by new teachers; the students will not be motivated to learn. She added that a teacher that maintains a good rapport with the students, the students will be susceptible to have a better learning commitment and if the teacher got transferred to a new school, the students would be frustrated. She said that *“If you have a teacher that don’t try to be close, the students will definitely be frustrated ad will not accept whatever the teacher is trying to teach. New teachers have this attitude, the old teachers, they know what to do. If you have a good teacher, the students will be motivated. They will be sad if the teacher leaves the school. So, it is important to bridge the gap”*.

The significance of comprehending the students’ sociocultural outlook is also explained by Teacher Umaida. She repeatedly stressed the importance of understanding the students’ sociocultural values in building good rapport with the students, consequently the effort would draw the students’ interest to participate more in the classroom. Personally, she made serious efforts in understanding the sociocultural values and use the students’ mother-tongue to understand more of the characters of the indigenous students and use it in her teaching and learning session. Examples of efforts taken by Teacher Umaida were talking to parents and staff that come from the indigenous village as the students to understand their values. She said that *“I often talk to the security guard, he is a Semai. I talk to him and try to understand the students”*. Later, she also mentioned about talking to parents, *“Whenever I meet the parents, I will make sure I talk to them about the importance of education. I also ask them about their lives in the village, what do the children do at*

home". She also said that *"I know that the students are not confident (to enter a competition organized outside the school), because they are afraid, you can say that they are accustomed to that (being afraid of new things) way, but I always encourage them to do better"*. Here, Teacher Umaida was using her knowledge about the students' fear of new things to encourage them to overcome the fear and participate in the activities.

Secondly, there are a lot of evidences that show that the teachers continuously developing the students' potential in co-curricular activities rather than just focusing on the academic activities. Most of the teachers expressed that they thought that the indigenous students show more potentials towards sports and cocurricular activities as compared to the academic subject. Teacher Sam clearly stated that based on her experience, the indigenous students were more interested to join sports activities rather than learning in the classroom. In fact, she thought that the children showed potentials sports. Some students, according to her; were selected to go competitions at the national level. She stated that *"Generally the kids here they are more towards sports, cocurricular activities, art. This school is well known for our hockey , takraw, soccer and many more. Some are chosen to the nationals"*. This point was also supported by Teacher Raziah who mentioned that the students gave a more negative response towards academic activities but gave outstanding participation outside the classroom activities. She thought that the students already had a mindset that learning was boring and they would automatically give unfavorable response towards the activity. She explained that *"We have sewang (indigenous traditional dance), art studio, for artsy things. The girls are good in hockey and the boys are good at sepak takraw. It is like a benchmark. For academic programmes, it is quite difficult. They are quite weak in academic. For example, if we do crossword puzzle or build sentences, their feedback is a bit slow. It seems that they have this mindset that it is learning"*. Furthermore, Teacher Sam stated that the students have more stamina in joining sports activities as the students lived in the jungle areas and used to outdoor lifestyles. According to her, she viewed this circumstance as an opportunity that is worth exploring for the benefits of the students. *"It is not about the skills (playing sports) that we are teaching them, but it is about their stamina that they have, it is impressive. Maybe because they are used to living in the jungle areas. We train them to be good at sports"*.

Furthermore, the teachers highlight that the students were not only interested in sports but they were really good in the area. Teacher Raziah said that the students are not only attracted to playing sports, but they have the talent to excel further in that area. She explained that there were two students who got admitted into Sports School, a prestigious national school that are catered for students that have potential in sports nationwide. Meanwhile, Teacher Farha narrated that the previous year she brought the students to a camping event under the Girl Scout's program. She said that the students were quite modest in the beginning, however they managed to win a few competitions related to Girl's Scout. She claimed that the students got first place in a knot tying competition and won third place in a dancing competition. *"Last year the Girls' Scout, we went for a camping*

trip. This is quite new. Last year they stand out, as they won the knot tying competition and they also won first place in a dancing competition”.

In short, the English language teachers face certain challenges in teaching the indigenous children, however, as teachers they did explore a few alternatives in their teaching and learning.

Discussion

It seems that there are a few obstacles faced by the English language teachers in teaching the indigenous school children. Firstly, there were problems of absenteeism among the students especially during the fruit-picking season. Teachers noted that this scenario happened due to the nature of their lives in the village, where fruit-picking is a source of income for their families. This finding coincides with the data presented by the Psychology Department of the Malaysian Ministry of Education, where the study showed that the attendance of indigenous children in an indigenous national school decreased from 84% in April-May 2018 to 76% from June to July 2018 (NST,2018). The issue of school attendance has been discussed in several studies such as Amiruddin, Abd. Samad & Othman (2015) and Singar & Zainuddin (2017). The second issue is the position of the English language as the third language that was making it difficult for the indigenous student to learn the language. Some teachers highlighted that the students had their own mother-tongue, which is Semai, making the Malay language, which is the national language, as the second language spoken by the school children. The English language is the third language of the indigenous children as mention in Mohd Asri Mohd Noor (2012). Thus, due to this fact, mastering a third language proved a bit difficult as the language was taught and practiced only in the school environment. Mohd Asri Mohd Noor (2012) described this task as a ‘formidable task’ as after the Ministry introduced the clusters school to upgrade the English language mastery among the indigenous school, data showed that the passes in the subject was around 42%. Finally, the lack of expert teachers was also mentioned as one of the obstacles mentioned by the teachers. They stated that they were not majoring in teaching the English language subject thus, they were unsure whether they were teaching the subject right. The lack of English teachers is not a new problem in Malaysia and not specific to indigenous school (Yee, 2020). It is a nationwide issue where English language subjects are taught by English option and non-option teachers. Yee (2020) defined English option teachers as teachers who are specifically trained to teach the English language, while non-option teachers are trained to teach other subjects but are given the responsibility to teach the subject to address the issue of shortages of the English language teachers.

The findings of the study also indicated that the teachers made several efforts to improve the teaching and learning activities despite being faced with a few difficult encounters. First, the teachers worked on developing a positive relationship with the students. They stressed the implications of understanding the sociocultural norms and ancestral language of the students. Teachers who made the effort to build rapport among students; according to the teachers, would inspire the students to be more participative in classroom lessons.

Apart from that, the teachers also attempted to understand the students' culture and use the knowledge to facilitate learning. These findings are parallel to the findings by Abdullah et al (2013) and Wahab & Mustapha (2015), in which they also highlighted the point that indigenous students value teachers who made efforts in building a relationship with the students. Abdullah et al (2013) stated that the teaching and learning process would go smoother if teachers apply more efforts in generating relationships among teacher and students. Their study also showed a similar finding with this study as, they stated that most teachers did try to build good relationship with the students. In addition, Wahab & Mustapha stated that students were more willing to learn high-cognitive subjects provided that the teacher has good personality and willing to cultivate good bonding with the indigenous students.

Finally, the findings also illustrate that the teachers tried to focus on the strength of the students in other domains, and not concentrating solely on academic achievement. The teachers claimed that they organized more cocurricular activities with the students as the indigenous students showed more interest in certain cocurricular activities. The teacher claimed that they involved the students in sports activities and cocurricular activities as the students showed potentials in excelling in those two areas. It means not only they are interested in joining the sport activities, the students were also good at playing sports. This finding concurs with the findings of Wahab & Mustapha (2015), where their study highlighted that the indigenous students showed more interest in subjects that involve psychomotor skills such as Art education, physical education, music, and cocurricular activities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges in teaching indigenous school children were the issues of absenteeism, learning English as a foreign language as well as issues of teachers' expertise. At the same time, the teachers worked on closing the gap between teachers and students to induce a pleasant teaching and learning process. Additionally, teachers constantly worked to involve students in sports cocurricular activities as they were more inclined doing activities that required psychomotor skills. The findings of this study are limited to a certain group of teachers in an indigenous school; however, they can be substantial evidences to understand the experiences of the English language teachers teaching the indigenous school children. It is hoped that this study could contribute to the professional development efforts and supportive agendas for teachers teaching indigenous school children.

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